

# Knott's Berry Farm . . . *old time fun!*



*The Orange County Archives*

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Presented by Archivist Phil Brigandi  
to the Orange County Board of Supervisors  
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## The Orange County Archives

- ◆ Walter Knott is a fascinating guy. I'm still trying to understand how you go from being a farmer to running an amusement park.
- ◆ One thing is clear, Walter Knott was a promoter from the start.
- ◆ Walter Knott was born in 1889 and grew up in Pomona. In 1911, he married Cordellia Hornaday.
- ◆ The Knott family, whose original farm was in the Mojave Desert, was lured to Buena Park by Walter's cousin Jim Preston in 1920. There they built a roadside berry stand and grew all sorts of berries.
- ◆ The following slide shows the original Preston and Knott berry farm in Buena Park around 1925.

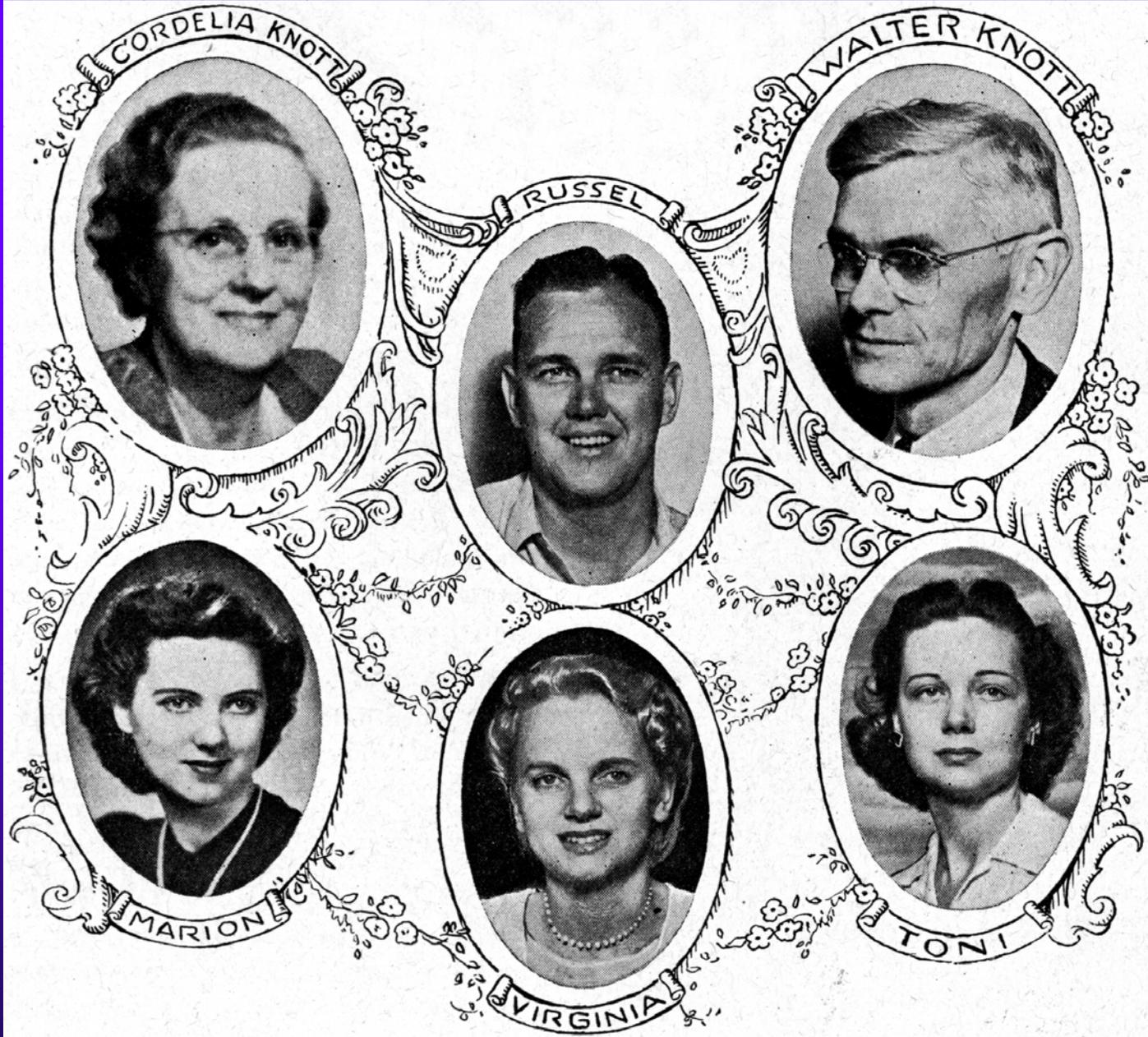


Preston and Knott Berry Farm ca.1925





- ◆ Preston and Knott dissolved their partnership in 1927. Walter then bought his first ten acres of farmland here in Orange County. He clearly had his eye on the future.
- ◆ In 1928, Walter built a new building with a berry market, a plant nursery and a tea room where Cordelia sold coffee and pies. He called it Knott's Berry Place.
- ◆ All of the Knott children – Russell, Marion, Virginia and Toni – grew up working at Knott's Berry Place. The next slide shows the entire Knott family.

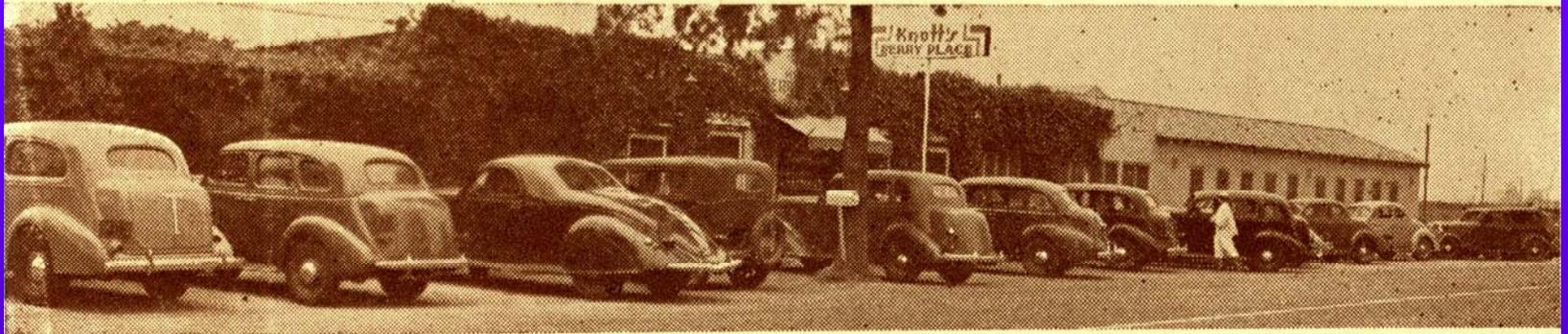




- ◆ To capitalize on the family's success, Walter started publishing little booklets in 1930 encouraging others to get into the berry business. He gave the booklets, *Berries and How to Grow Them* and *Berries and Rhubarb for Profit*, away for free to anyone that asked.
- ◆ But it wasn't until 1932 that he discovered the berry that he would make famous – the boysenberry.
- ◆ Walter Knott did not create the boysenberry. Rudolph Boysen, who was later parks superintendent in Anaheim for many years, first grew the new variety of berry during the 1920s. The berry was a cross between a blackberry, raspberry and loganberry. By the mid-1930s, it had become Knott's signature berry.
- ◆ In 1934, Cordelia got into the act, serving chicken dinners on her wedding china to customers at the berry stand. That proved so successful that in 1937, Walter built a 300-seat restaurant and kept it open year-round. Two years later, they doubled the size of the restaurant to 600 seats. That restaurant is shown in the next slide.



*This is the Dining Room your Friends have been telling you about.*



KNOTT'S BERRY PLACE Buena Park, { 22 miles  
from  
Los Angeles } California



- ◆ Not even the larger restaurant could keep up with the crowds. In 1940, Walter started building a ghost town, an attraction for people to visit while they waited for their chicken dinners to be served.
- ◆ Walter Knott came from pioneer stock: His grandparents came to California in a covered wagon in 1868 and his uncle was the sheriff of San Bernardino County during the boom days at Calico.
- ◆ Like many people back then, Walter believed that those frontier, pioneer experiences made America what it is. He wanted to celebrate that and to make sure people remembered their history.
- ◆ And it worked. People started coming from all over just to visit Ghost Town and have themselves a chicken dinner. The berry farm had become a theme park. It was Orange County's first big regional tourist attraction, and even today it's second only to Disneyland.



32 MAIN STREET  
GHOST TOWN  
KNOTTS BERRY FARM  
BUENA PARK, CALIF



- ◆ In 1947, they changed the name to “Knott’s Berry Farm.” That’s the same year the gold panning attraction was added.
- ◆ And Walter kept adding more buildings. Some were moved in from other areas. Others were built out of old materials, or were new buildings built to look old.
- ◆ As the ghost town grew, Walter started looking for other attractions to add. In 1952, the Ghost Town & Calico Railroad began running, using real, historic steam locomotives.
- ◆ And the Haunted Shack went in in 1954. That was always one of my favorites when I was a kid. Remember? With all those crazy tilts and angles?







- ◆ Then in the 1960s you can start to see the influence of Disneyland on Knott's Berry Farm. In fact, it was in 1960 that their first real adventure ride opened – the Calico Mine Ride. And by 1969 they got their first thrill ride – the Calico Log Co. flume ride.
- ◆ The other big thing that changed in the 1960s is that Knott's Berry Farm started charging admission. Up to that time, you could just walk on in to Ghost Town, and then if you wanted to ride the train or something like that, you bought a ticket. But in 1968, they finally put up a gate and started charging to get in – \$1 for adults, and 25¢ for children.
- ◆ One of the other things that makes Knott's Berry Farm unique is Independence Hall, which opened in 1966. This is a brick by brick replica of the original, complete with its own liberty bell. And I hear they had a tough time trying to figure out how to get it to crack just right.





- ◆ Independence Hall reflects Walter Knott's political beliefs. He was a firm believer in the American way of life, and the strength of democracy. This was during the Cold War, remember. For Walter Knott, our history as a democracy was part of what made America great, just like the Old West.
- ◆ Knott's Berry Farm continued to be a family-owned operation long after Walter Knott died in 1981. The park was finally sold in 1997 to Cedar Fair, from Sandusky, Ohio. They own eight major amusement parks and several water parks – most in the central part of the country.
- ◆ Cedar Fair started adding more thrill rides, such as GhostRider, Supreme Scream, and the Silver Bullet. They also opened Knott's Soak City adjoining the park in 2000.
- ◆ One wonders what Walter would have thought of thrill rides, but I think he'd be happy to find that Ghost Town is still there, and still full of people. And I'm happy to report that kids still like to pan for gold, and visit Boot Hill, and even talk to Sad Eye Joe in the jail.



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